

MULTITUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS

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A SERMON
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“In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”
Psalm 94:19.

IF MAN were a mere animal, his joy and sorrow would depend entirely upon outward things. Let but the trough be full, and the swine are happy; let the pasture be abundant, and the sheep are content; in the sunshine every sparrow will be twittering on the trees; let the heavens weep, and every wing is drooping; in long drought, or severe frost, or pinching famine, the animal creation languishes and pines. You cannot, however, be sure of making a man happy by surrounding him with abundance, nor can you plunge a Christian into wretchedness by any deprivations which you may cause him. Man's greatest joy or sorrow must arise from *inner springs*. The mind itself is the lair of misery or the nest of happiness; thoughts are the flowers from which we must distil the essential flavorings of life. Paul and Silas sing in the stocks because their minds are at ease, while Herod frets on his throne because conscience makes him a coward! The soul of Linneus exults within him at the sight of a common all golden with blooming shrubs, while many a millionaire has roamed amid his gardens and conservatories, and found no joy amid them. A crust of bread from one heart brings a song, but from another a thousand acres of ripening grain can produce no thanksgiving. Alexander, according to the old classic tale, sits down to weep over a conquered world, while many a peasant who has not a foot of ground to call his own rejoices in tribulation, and glories in reproach. Our weal or woe is the outgrowth of seeds germinating *within*, not of branches which from without run over the wall; happiness lies not in the outward, but in the inward. The fairest garden is that whose walks and arbors are in the secret of the soul—the richest and most mellow fruits are not plucked from the trees of the orchard, but are ripened within the spirit; hence the importance of our guarding well our thoughts. But this is the labor and difficulty, for thoughts are unstable things, unruly as the wild horses of the plains, fickle as the waves of the sea, swift as the swallow's wings, impetuous as the hurricane, changeable as the clouds of heaven! How are we to rule them? Sometimes they descend in clouds like the locusts, each one eager to devour our peace; they roar as the evening wolves—they howl like hungry dogs. Alas, poor boat, tossed to and fro by forces so subtle, variable, and ungovernable—what shall be done for you? Listen, for the text softly tells us that for the tempest-tossed mind, there is a haven of rest, an anchorage where the weakest may find shelter from the storm! Even when multitudes of thoughts are let loose, and the soul is seething and raging like a tempestuous sea, there is rest to be had—peace and quiet are yet reserved for the chosen of the Lord. The verse before us is most instructive, indicating as it does an oasis for desert travelers, a sunny island for weary voyagers: “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”

Our first meditation, this morning, will be concerning *multitudinous thoughts, and sacred comforts*; we shall afterwards pass on more briefly, to take *a nearer view of these divine consolations*; and we shall conclude by making *a contrast* from the text concerning those men who neither experience the multitudes of thoughts nor the comforts from on high.

I. MULTITUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS.

This passage may be interpreted several ways. The most natural would be, I think, to refer it to *thoughts tumultuous in the night of trial*. There are occasions when we are grievously tried with troubles of an unusual order; and then it often happens that the floodgates of our judgment are drawn up, and our liberated thoughts, in a raging torrent without order, rush upon us foaming and threatening. These thoughts will follow each other like gusts of an angry tempest. They may be such as these—the trouble itself, how severe it is, how it cuts one to the quick! Ten thousand other trials might have happened, any of which we fancy we could have borne more patiently, but this affliction is the direst of all, the fiercest lion of the woods. Will it be possible to escape from such a terrible calamity? Close upon the heels of this consideration will come the thought that the trial will be too much for you, that you will never be

able to bear it, that your patience will give way, and your faith will cast away her confidence, and give place to despair. Immediately in the rear of this, another suggestion will lift its black head; this trouble is the consequence of past sin—you have walked contrary to God, and He is now walking contrary to you; you would never have been made to smart thus if there had not been some gross disobedience of which you have not thoroughly repented—which God has still upon His mind, and therefore does He make you the target for His arrows. Then, like a serpent of the pit, there will dart upward the hissing and devilish suggestion—God is now giving you up! He has been merciful up to this moment, but this peculiar trial, so severe, so long continued, so piercing and penetrating, touching you in your most tender part—this is the turning point in your history! From this day forward everything will go hard with you, you think; all circumstances will be black and cloudy; you shall know no comfort and no rest, for God has forsaken you; your enemies will persecute and take you, and you yourself will be cast out like savorless salt.

“Ah,” says one, “such thoughts as these ought not to arise in any godly mind!” I know they ought not, but there they are, and I question whether any child of God can affirm that he has always been free from such conceptions in dark and tempestuous hours. Faith ought to shut the gate against every suggestion that would dishonor the veracity and loving-kindness of God, but unfortunately the watchman sleeps, and is troubled with weakness, and then the enemy comes in like a flood! Happy is he who in such a moment shall be able, by the Spirit of the Lord, to lift up a standard against him!

The thoughts that I have just uttered are only specimens of what will occur when the child of God is in the furnace, and under a cloud. Of course these thoughts will be different in every case, but they will rush, as I have already said, like a raging torrent, sweeping everything before it in headlong fury. Now, at such times it is a great blessing if God’s comforts are our stay and holdfast, delighting our souls. Happy is he who has found a heavenly breakwater against the floods of great waters, a store of consolations for the most imminent emergencies; to these consolations may you be led by the Holy Spirit. For a practical list of them I would refer you to the Psalm which lies open before us. You will observe that David derived comfort in his afflicted condition from the belief that God knew everything that he was suffering—“He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?” (Psa 94:9). “Ah,” says the soul, “whatever this trial may be, one thing is clear, my heavenly Father knows all about it; there is not a circumstance in my present condition which is hidden from Him; that eye which has watched me from my childhood is not closed towards me in this dark hour; He understands and knows the way that I take, and if I am surrounded with the thick darkness, it is no darkness to Him—

*“Even the hour that darkest seems
Will His changeless goodness prove.
From the mist His brightness streams,
God is wisdom, God is love.”*

“You God see me.” “He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” That is no mean consolation in the golden words which fell from the Savior’s lips—“Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.” The sevenfold heat of the furnace cools when we know that the Lord is there, “a very present help in trouble.”

Next to this, the psalmist was comforted by the belief that chastisement is blessed to the partaker of it. Note the 12th verse—“Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord.” “Then,” says the soul, “if it is not prosperity which is set forth as a mark of blessedness; if it is *adversity* which is the covenant spot, and the choice mark of a favored child of God, then will I congratulate myself in being made to smart beneath my gracious Father’s hand.”

Everything as to our state of mind depends upon the light in which we regard the dealings of providence. If our trouble comes to us as a curse; if, indeed, our afflictions are the first drops of that tremendous sheet of fire which will fall upon us forever from an angry God, then trial is indeed, an awful thing! But if it is so, that out of love to us we are made to undergo the necessary processes of tribulation—to prepare us like winnowed wheat for the peaceful garner, then we will accept our sufferings with joy! Welcome, O grief, if you are a black messenger loaded with treasure! Welcome, thrice! Welcome to my patient spirit, O rod of the covenant, soul-enriching, and sanctifying! Here, beloved, is a second consolation which revives the fainting soul when ready to swoon amid the heat and burden of oppressive thoughts. The psalmist goes on to declare that all adversity will have a happy end, “Judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it,” and then says the Spirit, “Though I may be cast down today, and sorely vexed, and though the wicked may be at ease, and spread themselves like green bay trees, yet there is an end appointed when the axe shall be for the root of the ungod-

ly, and when the glory shall be for the afflicted and poor saints.” A sight of the end makes us to judge rightly of the whole matter; all’s well that *ends* well. If the cup is not poison, but medicine, then its bitterness shall be sweetness to me; if the plowing is not for a sowing of salt beneath the curse of desolation, but for a seedtime of grace with a harvest of bliss, then plow on, O Lord, and though the furrows tear my soul, yet be it so, for the end makes amends, and therefore Your will be done!

The psalmist still further, in the midst of his troubles, kept himself in the belief of God’s faithfulness. I called your attention in the exposition to the strong utterance of the 14th verse—“For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance.” If we could believe it possible that God might allow His chosen children to perish, and that those who trust in Him might under certain circumstances be confounded, we might very well wrap our faces in sackcloth, and go our way in wretchedness, like the slaves of despair, but the Lord has never utterly deserted one of His servants yet, and He never will! When all His waves and His billows went over David, yet the Lord commended His loving-kindness in the daytime, and gave His servant a song in the night, for God was the health of his countenance, and his God forever and ever. The Lord has made His servants to endure trials great and many—they have gone through fire, and through water—but in every case the delivering arm has been made bare, and in their extremity the opportunity of love has certainly arrived. Rejoice then, O you who are vexed with multitudes of troublous thoughts, and let the infallible faithfulness of your God delight your souls!

Once more in that Psalm, David dwells upon his own past experience—“Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slips, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up.” How often have you and I found it to be one of the shortest ways to renew our hope, when we have called to mind the former days, and the years of past mercy! We have said, “Was He not with me on the field of strife, to deliver me from the tumult of the people? Did I not obtain mercy from Him when I was brought very low? Did I not find safety beneath the shadow of His wings when the storm of the terrible ones assailed me? He that has enabled me to erect so many Ebenezers in days past has not helped me thus far to put me to shame at the end—He has not revealed all this loving-kindness and truth to me that He, after all, may make me ashamed of my hope.” We have not to deal with a changeable God! Oh, no! He assuredly will complete the work which His wisdom has begun; all His power shall be put forth to finish the work of *divine grace*. Such thoughts as these, in the times when our heart is much distracted, will be found to minister not merely consolation, but a deep profound quiet, and even a holy exhilaration amounting, as our text has it, to “delight.” “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts *delight* my soul.”

Brothers and sisters, I have thus spoken upon the text as referring to tumultuous thoughts in the night of trial. Permit me to remind you that it will be equally right to refer it to *perplexing thoughts and periods of dilemma*. The path of life to some men is remarkably straightforward—from their circumstances and surroundings they are very seldom at a loss to know the path of duty; but with many others the narrow way is, to all appearances, exceedingly like the track of the children of Israel through the wilderness—in and out, backward and forward—“progressive, retrograde, and standing still.” Oftentimes have we come to a turning in the road where human wisdom is at a state of perplexity as to know whether to select the right hand or the left. Two ways may appear equally right *morally*, but yet the choice of either of them may involve the most solemn consequences as to our future. I suppose that almost every Christian has had to look about him for signposts, and at times he has found none; he has felt like a traveler in the trackless bush of Australia, and he has been obliged to go down on his knees, and cry to God that he may hear a voice behind him saying, “This is the way, walk in it.”

I may be addressing some of you today who are perplexed with a multitude of conflicting thoughts as to your course in life; you do not know what to do; a certain plan has suggested itself, and for a time it has seemed the very best course for you, but just now your mind wavers, for another course presents itself, and there is much to say in its favor. You are bewildered; you cannot see the clue of providence; you are lost as in a maze. Indeed, at this moment you are much dispirited, for you have tried various ways and methods to escape from your present difficulty, but you have been disappointed where you expected relief, and probably that which you are about to attempt will end in disappointment, too! Your thoughts compass you about like bees, or as the flies of Egypt’s plague, they worry, but do not help you; you are distracted, and your thoughts have no order about them, for while they lean one way at this moment, they drag you in the opposite direction the next second; the currents meet and twist you as in a whirlpool. Now, my dear perplexed friend, at such a time your plight may remind you of the children of

Israel at the Red Sea, with the sea before them, and the rocks on either hand—and the cruel Egyptians in the rear, and you must imitate their action and “stand still, and see the salvation of God.” But, you reply, “I cannot be quiet; I am too agitated.” Brothers and sisters let patience have her perfect work; in quietness shall be your strength. Yet you reply, “My spirit is restless and impetuous; I wish I could be calm, for then I could better judge my position, and probably discover the way of escape; but I am perturbed, perplexed, tossed up and down, distracted! Alas, what shall I do?” Then listen to the text, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul.” Turn your eyes to those deep things of God which have a divine power to allay the torment of your spirit; cease from a too anxious consideration of the things which are *seen* and *temporal*, and gaze by faith upon the things which are *unseen* and *eternal*; remember that your way is ordered by a higher power than your will and choice. The eternal destiny of God has fixed *your every footstep*; believe that wisdom, not blind fate, but *wisdom*, has ordained the bounds of your habitation, and fixed your position and your condition so definitely that no fretfulness of yours can change it for the better! In the ordinance of God, all your history is fixed so as to secure His glory, and your *soul’s* profit; your present sorrow is the bitter bud of greater joy; your transient loss secures your ultimate and never-ceasing gain! How I rejoice to believe that the Lord shall choose my inheritance for me! All things are fixed by a Father’s hand, by no arbitrary and stern decree, but by His wise counsel and tender wisdom; He who loved us from before the foundations of the world has immutably determined all the steps of our pilgrimage! Why, then, disturb yourself? There is a hand upon the helm which shall steer your vessel safely enough between the rocks, and by the quicksand, away from the shoals and the headlands, through the mist, and through the darkness, safely to the desired haven! Our Pilot never sleeps, and His hand never relaxes its grasp. It is a blessed thing, after you have been muddling and meddling as you ought not to do with the affairs of providence, to leave them alone, and cast your burden upon the Lord. Oftentimes in my own short career in connection with this church, and with the many works of God committed to my charge, I have been brought to pure perplexity; I have considered and judged, and been perplexed; and then discovering my gross folly, encumbering myself with much serving, I have at last, by His grace, resolved to lay my care upon the shelf, and I have said unto the Lord, “I will never fret about this matter again; you shall judge and work for Your poor servant.” Brothers and sisters, hear my testimony! Things have always gone right with me when I have been brought to this! Whereas they have been wrong enough when I have befogged myself with care, and have wondered how the College and the Orphanage could be provided for and 50,000 other things; when I have left all with my Lord, HE has brought forth my righteousness as the light, and my judgment as the noonday. I charge you, therefore, children of God in dilemma, roll your burdens upon God, and He will sustain you, and give you to rejoice in beholding His wisdom and His love.

The text will endure no straining if we read it as declaring that when *remorseful thoughts pass over us in the hour of recollection*, we may find peace in the comforts of God. Remorseful thoughts, I say—and what man among you could look back steadily and undismayed upon the whole course of his life? Take away the cross, and no Christian dares recall the past to his memory; each individual hair might stand on end with horror at the remembrance of the ruin into which our past iniquity has plunged us! Memory does well, beneath the shadow of the atonement, to turn over each leaf of her diary. There are the sins of one’s youth, and the sins of mature years; there are sins of ignorance, and sins against the light of God, and knowledge; secret sins, and sins before the face of the sun, and all together, how many? Who shall count them? We have perpetrated aggravated offenses inasmuch as we have repeated sins which we professed to have repented of—sins in our case have worn a blacker hue because of circumstances which made them to stand without excuse. How frequently our evil ways have been injurious to others! At times that thought stings as does an adder, for we may have led others into sin who have not yet repented—who are going down to the pit to reap the reward of sins into which we drew them! Alas, the recollections of the past do not end in their painfulness with our conversion, since we have continued to transgress. Our sins of omission rise like Andes for height; our sins of commission reach to the clouds; sins against the church, and against the world, against our families, against ourselves; sins against the precious blood, sins against the blessed Spirit, sins against our loving Father—who shall count them? And when these sins are attentively viewed by the soul—not glanced at superficially, but looked into with hearty and honest repentance—how often will the question arise, “*Can there be forgiveness for all these?* Is it possible that they are blotted out? Is it not all a delusion, and a dream, that such iniquity is really washed away?” And thought will follow thought, like lightning flashes in the thick of the tempest, till the soul will be broken in pieces with dismay, unless it turns to God’s comforts

which alone can delight the penitent soul. Behold them now! There is a God of mercy, infinite mercy, and the greatest sin cannot be equal to the greatness of His power to forgive! There is a fountain filled with blood, and the power of that blood is not exhausted! Jesus is a living intercessor—"If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The five wounds are still pleading, and though our sins are as scarlet, there stands the unwavering promise that they shall be as wool! Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as snow! Brothers and sisters, it is of great service to the soul for us to go back frequently to our starting point; our first penitence is one of the most lovely traits of the Christian character, and ought to be always manifest; we should always be weeping for sin, but the tears should fall upon the Savior's feet. We should weep because our sins are *forgiven*! We should rest upon Jesus as guilty sinners still in ourselves, having nothing more to rest upon today, after 20 years of walking with God, than we had at the very first—for then we had the atoning blood, and we have nothing more than that at this hour as the ground of our acceptance with God. O let us keep to this—that when many bitter thoughts are stirred as to the past, we may see the living Savior presenting His atoning sacrifice before the throne of God and may in it, rejoice! The word "delight," has in this place in the original Hebrew, the idea of dancing, and indeed, our heart exults and leaps for joy at the sight of the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ! Bold can we stand before God when we plead the righteousness of Christ! Though our sins are many, yet none shall lay them to our charge, and though they are black, yet are they forgiven, and none shall dare accuse whom God absolves!

Let us not further linger. There are often with us *thoughts of heart-searching in seasons of spiritual anxiety*—and it is a blessed thing, in the multitude of our thoughts of heart-searching, if the comforts of God can still delight our soul. God forbid we should ever say a word to discourage professors from the duty of self-examination. Our salvation is too solemn a thing to be taken upon trust; no man has any right to believe that he is saved upon any assumed, and taken-for-granted ground of assurance; he who is afraid to examine himself has need to be afraid—for God will examine him! He who is right, is never afraid of being searched, but rather he prays, "*Search me, O God, and try me, and know my ways.*" Yet, under self-examination, thoughts like these will naturally take wing in the heart—"Am I truly born-again? That conversion of mine, was it a fancy, or was it a reality? Do I know what the indwelling, purifying, quickening power of the Holy Spirit is, or is my experience only imagination? Is the change within me merely a transient desire after reformation? Am I still in a carnal and unrenewed state? Do I produce the fruits of righteousness? Do I live as Christians are said to live? Do I follow after Holiness in the fear of God? Do I, in very truth, love Christ, or is it only a pretense? Do I heartily serve Him? Does the love of Christ actually constrain me?" Ah, brothers and sisters, when I recollect my own daily infirmities, I must confess I cannot always answer those questions without much debate of spirit, and I suspect that the most of you, in the matter of solemn heart-questioning, do not find things going very smoothly with you, either. At such times, in the multitude of your thoughts within you, you will discover no delight unless you cast yourself upon the consolations which God has prepared for such a case, and I think they are these—"Well, if I never did love my Lord, if it were all a mistake, yet He still receives sinners, and I will go to Him. If, after all, my religion has been a pretense, yet He has said, 'Look unto Me and be you saved.' My faith shall even now look up to the Lamb of Calvary, the divine Savior. Jesus, I am guilty, but oh, I trust You." I know there is no consolation like this! Never mind your experience—in hours of doubt leave it, and fly at once to Jesus! If the devil calls your profession a lie, let him do so, but remember there is no lie in that sacrifice that makes reconciliation for sin between the believer and his God—and to that blessed sacrifice, all guilty and undone as we are, let us fly at once!

These consolations will yet delight your soul if you push them farther. Having looked to the precious blood; then read your adoption in Christ, your union to Christ, your interest in the covenant through Christ, your personal security by virtue of union to Christ! Get once to the cross, and you have reached the wellhead of consolations!

We must not tarry there however, but further observe that sometimes we have multitudes of *thoughts of foreboding in days of depression*. These dark prophesyings are sometimes about us. How many of God's people say, "Alas I shall die in a workhouse! I do not know what will become of me in old age, when these fingers cannot earn my daily bread." At other times, and with some of us, much more often, we prophesy evil concerning our work—"The Holy Spirit will withdraw from our church; our ministry will not be useful; our various works will fall to pieces; we shall see those who profess to be zealous go back to the world again." Such thoughts as these haunt us: "The Sunday school teacher will be afraid lest there should be no conversions in the class, or that supposed conversions will turn out to be mis-

takes”; when you once get into the foreboding line it is very easy to be a great prophet of evil, and to believe yourself when not a word of what you are saying has a smattering of truth in it! Then we dream dreadful things concerning our nation. According to the gloomy prophets, all England is going to bad—not England alone, but all countries are hastening on to a general and everlasting crash! Then one begins to fret about the church of God for, according to the soothsayers of the age, Antichrist is yet to come, and new heresies are to spring up! The dogs of war are to be let loose, the Pope is to rule and burn us, and one hardly knows what else! Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation have been made, sometimes, to minister poison to every bright hope! But, brothers and sisters, here is our comfort with regard to the future—

*“He everywhere has sway!
And all things serve His might!
His every act pure blessing is,
His path unsullied light.”*

Let the worst come to the worst, the best will come of it before long! “If the heavens were a bow,” says one, “and the earth were the string, and God should fit the arrows of His vengeance, and shoot at the sons of men, yet they could find shelter with the Archer Himself.” Our refuge is in God! Let the worst calamities occur to the world in years to come, we are secure! It must be well—it cannot be ill! “Jehovah-Jireh!” Lift high the banner, and hopefully advance to the battle, for the victory shall surely come unto the eternal arm, the immutable will!

Once more. Occasionally we have *profound thoughts in times of meditation*—and whenever we enter into profound considerations it is well for us to know the comforts which will delight our souls. Certain minds are very prone to contemplations upon themes more puzzling than profitable, such as predestination and free will. We have, all of us I suppose, picked at that Gordian knot in our time, and we have been vain enough to hope to untie it. But that deed is not for us; many and many a good hour have we wasted over that dark mystery; how far the eternal God has fixed, and how far responsible man is left free. Milton pictures the very devils musing upon that metaphysical problem, and doubtless the angels have pondered it too; but only God’s mind shall perfectly unriddle that enigma. Whenever we are oppressed with that great mystery, it will cheer us to know comforts of God which delight our souls. Among those comforts stands the grand fact that God is righteous—that He cannot err—that there cannot possibly be anything in sovereignty that wars with mercy or with justice. Believing, moreover, that whoever believes in Christ Jesus has everything on his side, we can leave the riddle solved or unsolved, and feel that it is small concern to us! There are many other great mysteries in the word of God, and foolish persons utterly befog themselves with them. Indeed, some minds never seem to be satisfied until they reach to something which they cannot comprehend, and then they are ready to give up the Bible altogether! They act like one who should come into a feast, and after turning over all the good things, should at last find a bone with no meat upon it, and should insist upon it that he would not eat a morsel until he could digest that one particular bone! How foolish of men! They will not receive what they might grasp and comprehend, and might be improved by—because of some one thing that happens to be above their comprehension! I bless God for a religion which I *cannot* understand! If I could perfectly understand it, I would not believe it to be of God, for I should be sure it did not come from the infinite God if I could grasp it, and comprehend it. But oh, those blessed abysses of the truths of God beyond my depth where I am obliged to cast myself upon the Lord, and swim in His love! Oh, those soul-expanding mysteries—how well they give play for faith, and room for confidence in God—where the soul, having done her best to grasp and comprehend, falls back upon her God, and says, “How infinite You are; what a worthless worm I am; I bow before You in adoration, and trust You in affection.” “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul.” Enough, then, upon our first point; I fear the multitude of my words have given you a weary sense of what a multitude of thoughts must be!

II. I could wish that we had time to VIEW THESE SACRED COMFORTS which we have hinted at this morning. But I ask your attention very briefly to a summary.

View these comforts in *their nature*. They are said to be God’s comforts. “Your comforts delight my soul,” by which I understand that they are comforts concerning God; that is, connected with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This triple well continually overflows with consolation; the more a believer thinks of his God, the more of God’s comfort he will have. I understand the expression to mean also comforts *prepared* by God, and comforts *revealed* by God; comforts which divine mercy has ordained for the troubled sons of men; comforts which the Holy Spirit has revealed in the pages of inspiration. I understand however, more than this. The comforts that make us glad amid distractions are such as are

applied by God Himself. This text has been read, and I believe rightly, by putting in a stop in a different place from that in which I have put it in my reading. “In the multitude of my thoughts, *within me*, Your comforts delight my soul.” For only when the comforts of God get *within* us do they become effectual comforts to us. Man may pour the richest balm into the *ears* in words, but only the Holy Spirit’s pouring it into the *soul* in very deed and truth can make the heart glad. It may also be possible that my text may mean, “Your comforts,” that is, the very comforts enjoyed by Jesus Christ, Himself, the Son of God, for in the multitude of our thoughts we are often brought to rejoice where Christ rejoiced—in the joy that is set before us of God’s ultimate glory in the salvation of the chosen. We are made to drink of the cup of trembling of which Christ drank, and we are also enabled to drink of the cup of rejoicing which made Him glad in the house of His pilgrimage. Understand then, the comforts which God gives us to be comforts about Himself, comforts prepared and revealed by Himself, comforts applied by the Holy Spirit, and comforts which have been participated in the days of His flesh by the Son of God Himself.

When Archbishop Whately lay a-dying, a friend said to him, “Sir, you are great in death as well as in life.” The good man shook his head, and replied, “I am dying as I have lived, a simple believer in Jesus Christ.” “But what a blessing it is,” said the other, “that your glorious intellect does not fail you at the last.” “There is nothing glorious,” said he, “but Jesus Christ.” “Still,” said the other, “your grand endurance is a great support to you.” “I have no support but faith in the crucified Savior,” said he. Comfort, you see, comes to believers from nothing in *themselves*—all peace proceeds from the Lord alone!

Observe, next, these comforts in their *stability*. They effectually sustain the spirit in times when they are required, for “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul.” Many consolations are like the life-buoys we heard so much of a few weeks ago, which are exceedingly useful on dry land, but of no service whatever when once a man trusts his life to them in the sea. Even thus the world’s consolations are prized when they are not needed, but prove themselves to be something worse than ridiculous confidences when men most need their assistance!

Once more, I must ask you to notice concerning these comforts their real *efficiency*. “Your comforts delight my *soul*.” Not my animal nature, not my external nature, but my very *self*. The comforts of God penetrate to the marrow of our manhood; they feed the vital spark; they make the man himself most thoroughly glad. Your wine, your corn, your oil—these do but tickle the palate; your music, your viol, and your dance—these do but please the ear, the eye, the foot; but the comforts of God touch the man himself, the essential inner core of the man’s nature. “Your comforts delight *my soul*.”

Note that word “*delight*.” God’s comforts not merely console, sustain, and quiet my soul, but they “delight” it. And that too in the midst of tumultuous thoughts! Brothers and sisters, I know and speak by experience what I now say! There is a sad uneasiness in mirth, and there is a matchless repose in sorrow; I have never been more deeply happy than when I have been laid low with chastening; when I have been broken in pieces all asunder, faith has found her strength in helplessness, her end of care in the end of her self-reliance; when unbelief whispered rebelliously, “God must have His way, His cruel way,” and when the heart was reconciled to leave it there, a sweet peace reigned within. Yes, there is deep joy amid deep sorrow when the spirit is hushed and quiet, and the soul is even as a wearied child. May it always be your case, beloved friends, if ever the Lord shall call you to pass through deep waters, to find the pearls that lie hidden there; to mark the light that springs up in the midnight, and the joy that comes in the morning when the weeping is forever over.

III. Now, the last thing, with which I send you away, is A CONTRAST.

Too many of our fellow men never think at all. Thinking should be the easiest thing a man could attempt, for he has not to lift his hand or move his foot, but the multitude of men will do anything rather than think. Their thoughts, if they have any, are like a swarm of gnats, volatile, dancing up and down, light, useless! O that men would think! It is always a hopeful sign, if not of divine grace, yet of a prelude for the working of the Spirit of God, when men are brought to consider. We need not so much dread infidelity as carelessness. I had rather men would think wrongly than not think at all; when a man is awake enough to defy God, it is an awful thing, but there is something to be made of him—he is not quite asleep. There is a chance that this Goliath who defies his God may have a stone sent through his forehead, and by the way of his thinking may yet be brought low; but it is people who go about their daily work and pleasure, and never think at all who seem to be the devil’s peculiar portion; how few of these ever get to be converted! O for a thunderclap to make the world think! Cholera, pestilence, war, calamity—these oftentimes come from God as a voice to make men consider; but in these soft and gentle times, men are lulled to false security, and down to the abyss of woe the multitude are being swept. I

cannot but compare thousands of my fellow men to the Indian whose story, which I remember to have read years ago in Whitecross' *Anecdotes*. Whether the tale is true or not, I cannot tell. It is said that on the great river of America there was once seen a canoe some miles off Niagara floating down the stream, and as the current turned it so that those on the bank could well perceive it, they saw that the paddle was slipped, and an Indian was lying in the canoe fast asleep. They shouted as best they could to awake him, for they knew well the imminent hazard of the poor wretch; they shouted and called aloud, as they ran along the bank, but it was of no use. He had either been drinking or had been so fatigued that his slumber was most profound, and the canoe went floating on, continually increasing its pace. It at last dashed against a headland, and spun round in the torrent, and they said one to another, "He is safe, the man will be awakened; such a start as that will surely awaken him, and he will paddle out of danger." But no, he went right on till the roaring of the falls was near, and then the course of the boat was so rapid that none could keep up with it, and it went whirling on faster and faster; so profound was the Indian's sleep that for a while even the roar of the falls did not awaken him, but at last he was awakened, and then he grasped his paddle—but it was too late—he was borne onward, and the last that was seen of him was his standing bolt upright in the boat, as it plunged over the abyss, and was never seen or heard of again. Ah, my fellow men, how like this are those of you who are asleep, and are borne onward by the treacherous current! That fever, that sickbed like a headland jutting into the stream—we would think it would have made you think! That frail boat of yours was twisted round and round; O that your soul had but been awakened from its slumber! The noise of hell may well be in your ears, and the sound that comes up from the abyss of terror may well awaken you, but alas, I fear you will sleep on until the cataract of destruction shall be just before you in the pangs of death, and then, alas, full of horror, you shall seek escape when escape is no longer possible! God grant that none of us may thus sleep ourselves into a world of woe, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 94.

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